

Remarks on the Job Access Initiative in Denver, Colorado October 14, 2000

Well, come in a little closer there. Carmen, stand up here. I want you in this picture. [Laughter] Let me, first of all, thank Carmen Carrillo for welcoming us here today. I just had a wonderful time upstairs. I went up and talked to all the staff that were up there and met with a lot of the young people who were there who are working on trying to educate kids, give young adults the training they need, help young people avoid teen pregnancy and HIV infection. I thought they were terrific.

I just wanted to say, I wanted to come here today, in part, because of what you're doing here. And those of you who are here, trying to improve your lives represents everything I've tried to do as President. I'm very proud of you, and I love this place.

I want to thank the Secretary of Transportation, Rodney Slater, who is, like me, from Arkansas. We've worked together for almost 20 years now. He was underage when I first enlisted his services. [Laughter] And it will be apparent in a moment why I asked him to come today and join us.

And I want to thank Mayor and Mrs. Webb for their leadership. And thank you, Wilma, for your service in the administration. Denver has prospered under your leadership, done well, and you've been a great partner for the Clinton-Gore administration. We've done a lot of things in Denver. We even brought the leaders of the eight big industrial nations here to a conference about 5 years ago. My friendship with you and the work that we've done with this city have meant a great deal to me, and I thank you so much. Thank you, Mr. Mayor.

This is the first chance I've had in a couple days to make a public statement, and I think it's appropriate, in a way, that I make a few remarks about—before I get into what I came to talk about today—about the troubles in the Middle East and the terrorist attack which resulted in the loss of many of our sailors. I'm sure you've been following it.

Some of those sailors are being brought home today, and they'll be brought home over the next several days, both the wounded and those who were killed, and we'll have a memorial service for them on Wednesday. But what I'd like

to say to you—I don't know if in the local press there have been any profiles of them. But a lot of those people who were killed came out of neighborhoods like this, several Latinos, one young African-American girl only 19 years old, just completed her Navy training. Most of them were trying to do with their lives what you're trying to do with your lives, and they wanted to do it by serving their country in the United States Navy. And they were not over there on any hostile mission. They were simply patrolling and keeping the peace and stability of the region. So I hope you'll say a prayer for them and their families tonight. This is a difficult time for them.

It's also very troubling in the region. There was all the troubles you've seen between the Israelis and the Palestinians, who were so close to a peace agreement. There was a hijacking today in the Middle East. We have no idea whether it's related to any of this or not, and we may not know for a while. But I'm going to leave—I'm going to the West Coast from here, then I'm going to red-eye back to Washington and fly over there to Egypt tomorrow, in an attempt to try to help put things back together. So I hope we'll have your prayers on that, too.

But I ask today you specifically, think about those families that lost their loved ones, because most of those folks were just trying to do what you're trying to do and serve their country. They were wonderful people, very young, so their families need all the support of the all the American people.

Now, let me talk about what I think is the good news of what you're doing and what I think we should be doing to help. In 1992, when I ran for President, I went to the American people with a very simple but, I think, profoundly important vision. I said that I thought every person willing to be a responsible citizen should have an opportunity to share in the American dream and that I thought to achieve that, we had to be a stronger community; we had to understand that we were going forward together and that nobody should be left out or left behind.

Well, it turns out most Americans agreed with that, and together the country has made great strides. You all know we've had the longest economic expansion in the history of the United States. We have the lowest unemployment rate in 30 years. When I became President, unemployment in Colorado was 6.1 percent. It's 2.7 percent now. Unemployment among African-Americans and Hispanics is the lowest ever measured. And together we've had over 22 million new jobs, almost 600,000 right here in Colorado.

But we're also not just better off. I think we're a better nation because poverty is down, crime is down, teen pregnancy is down. Last year we even had a reduction in the number of people without health insurance, for the first time in a dozen years, thanks to the Children's Health Insurance Program. And homeownership, test scores, high school graduation rates, and the college-going rate, all those are up.

So to paraphrase what Al Gore used to say in 1992, when everything that should be up was down, everything that should be down was up: Now the things that should be up are up, and the things that should be down are down, and we can be grateful for that.

One of the most important things that would have been almost unthinkable 8 years ago is that the welfare rolls have been cut by more than half nationwide. Millions of parents have joined the work force. Now, how did this happen? Well, first, the strong economy helps, because more workers were needed.

Secondly, we changed the rules so that all able-bodied people who can work, have to work. But we obligated the Federal Government to enable them to succeed as parents, as well as workers, by investing more in training, more in child care and maintaining the guarantee of food and medical care for children. And it's working.

But after all that, it also became necessary to have a system. That's what you have here, in Mi Casa. It's this fabulous system. You don't just deal with one part of a person's problem. People come here, families can come here and be dealt with. And if there weren't a place like this, even with a strong economy, even with a better welfare reform law, what we've tried to do would not have been nearly as successful.

So all these innovative welfare to work partnerships between the Federal Government and States and local governments are important. And

also in the private sector—we have 12,000 private companies who've joined our welfare to work partnership and committed to hire people from the welfare rolls. And they have—these 12,000 companies, themselves, some of them are as small as 40 and 50 employees; some of them have tens of thousands. But they have hired hundreds of thousands of people from the welfare rolls. Right now, I can tell you, the retention rates are better than other first hires in all those companies. And they're doing very, very well.

Denver has been a real leader here, thanks to Mayor Webb and people like Carmen. You offer education, employment, child care services in one place; train potential workers in places like Mi Casa, support employers who train new workers for themselves. So the Federal Government—where are you—[laughter]—I asked Carmen on the way down here, I said, "Where do you get the money to run this place?" And she said, "Well, we get some money from the Department of Labor. We get money from the welfare to work partnership."

But the point is, you've got to have some place where the people can come and get what they really need. And the places that are doing best are places that have really put things together. In Denver there's also an effort to help fathers get jobs and pay child support and stay involved with their children's lives.

So here's the point I want to make, and here's why I'm here. While the welfare rolls have dropped by more than 50 percent nationwide, which is huge, in Denver the welfare rolls have dropped 90 percent—90 percent. Now, once that happens, you've got to focus on making sure the people who get off welfare stay off and that hard-working families succeed. And that's what is happening here now.

But I came here today to talk about what more we can do to help more people get off welfare and stay off, and also to highlight the importance of places like Mi Casa and how we need it everywhere in America, because we can drive these rolls down even more if we have the kind of operations you have here in Denver. And that's where—there are some more things we need to do, too, and that's where Secretary Slater and I come in.

One of the most important things in helping Americans move from welfare to work is making sure they can get from where they live to where the job is. And this is still a huge problem

nationwide. Listen to this. Two-thirds of all the new jobs in America are being created in the suburbs, but three-quarters of the Americans who are still on public assistance live in inner cities or small rural towns. So you've got the jobs here in the suburbs, and the people in the inner cities or out here in the country somewhere. And our public transportation networks simply have not kept up with the changing patterns and the disconnect between living and working.

Now, we can help some people move where the jobs are. Under the leadership of our HUD Secretary, Andrew Cuomo, we have been able to get a bipartisan majority in Congress to go along with giving a lot of people who are eligible for public housing, housing vouchers so they can go find whatever is available, because, as all of you know, with the growth of the economy there is a real housing shortage in America, and there is a huge public housing shortage. So the housing vouchers have made a difference. I think we have an agreement with the Congress this year—I haven't signed the law yet, but I'm pretty sure we got the deal done last week to increase the number of housing vouchers next year so we can keep doing this.

But no matter how much we do that, there will still be large numbers of people who live someplace different from where the jobs are, who want to go to work, can go to work, and are capable of doing whatever it takes to be a qualified employee.

So we can't continue with a system where people have to take three or four buses to get to work or they can't get to work at all on public transport, so they've got to get a friend or a family member to give them a ride to work every day. And a lot of you are nodding your heads. You know, what do you do if the friend or family members gets sick? What do you do if their kids get sick? What do you do if your kid is sick? There are a lot of problems with this sort of ad hoc system.

And we do have a lot of people, literally, who still can't get a job because they can't get to the job. That is inconsistent with our goal of opportunity for every responsible citizen. It's inconsistent with our responsibilities as a national community to help each other go forward together. And it's inconsistent with helping people get off and stay off welfare.

So from the beginning, in our administration, the Vice President and I have worked with Con-

gress to try to build transportation links to where the jobs are. Three years ago, we proposed something called the job access initiative, and we worked with Congress and got a lot of support for it. It basically gives grants to communities to figure out what the solution is in their community, because it's different from place to place. Last year we funded over \$71 million worth of grants for 42 States, and transit authorities have used this money to add new routes, to extend the hours of existing routes, which is a big problem in some places, and also to create vanpools when there is no practical public transit option.

They have brought work to the doorsteps—already with this job access initiative, to the doorsteps of 13,500 employers, which has enabled hundreds of thousands of people to find new ways to get to work, take their kids to school, and expand their own horizons through training and education.

Last year those grants went to six Colorado communities, almost three-quarters of a million dollars to help them design and build transportation links that connect workers to jobs. Today I'm here to announce that this year, we're going to have \$73 million in grants to 39 States and the District of Columbia. There will be three in Colorado, and one I hope will particularly benefit those of you who are here at Mi Casa: \$700,000 to extend bus routes in Denver to help people travel to jobs at suburban business parks in the Denver tech center.

Now, upstairs, one of the women asked me upstairs—she said, “You need to do more to get women training and access to nontraditional jobs, jobs that women don't normally hold.” And we talked about some of the things that we've been doing with the unions to train more women to do construction-related jobs—like you, right? *[Laughter]* Is that how you hurt your arm?

And we talked about the work we're trying to do in Silicon Valley and other places to try to train more women to go to work in high-tech industries where there is a huge gender gap in employment participation. And we talked about really nontraditional things like the massive shortage we've got in America for licensed truck drivers now—a huge, huge shortage all over America. Now, it's tough if you've got young kids, because you've got to be gone for big chunks of time, so it's not a practical alternative to some. But for some people, it is an

alternative. They've got family circumstances, or others they can do.

Our focus here today is to try to do what we can do to help communities like Denver succeed even more and also to try to get other communities to develop the models that you have that has worked so well. You simply can't go to work if you can't get to work; and now more and more people will be able to find work, get there, and either move off of welfare or stay off welfare.

Now, let me also say that we're entering the final weeks of the congressional session. We are already well past the end of the budget year, which ended on September 30th. And the Congress all wants to come home and campaign, but they have to finish their business first.

And a lot of the business I think they ought to finish relates to the needs of the people who have come through the doors at Mi Casa. Congress should raise the minimum wage, again. I have asked them to raise it by a dollar an hour over the next 2 years. That would have helped 10 million hardworking American families. I've also asked them to provide more tax relief for working people: to increase the child care tax credit and make it refundable; to help give families a long-term care tax credit, because a lot of people are caring for elderly or disabled family members, and they can't afford to go to nursing homes, or they don't want them to, but they need some help at home; to give a tax deduction for the cost of college tuition; and to help people even with very modest incomes save for their own retirement.

So there are very important things that can be done. I think the earned-income tax credit, for which most of you with children are eligible, which has lifted over 2 million people out of poverty just in the last few years alone, should be expanded again, particularly for people with three or more kids. The way the earned-income tax credit works, you max out if you have a certain number of children. But there are a lot of people that have four kids or five kids, that are trying to work, and I believe they should be able to get more relief. So that's all very important, and I hope that will pass.

Something else that I think would be really helpful is that our budget has proposals to promote responsible fatherhood and to increase child support paid directly to families. Now, if the States collect your child support, they can withhold a portion of it because of the cost

of collecting it. But if the child support check is meager, you may not wind up much ahead, even if the father is paying the child support. So we propose to change that. I think there is very broad support for this, and I hope and believe it will pass before the Congress goes home.

We also have proposals that would help families save and expand access to child care and housing and health care. So I hope very much that this will pass.

And finally, let me say for the people who live where the jobs aren't, there is a very important bipartisan initiative that I've worked on with the Speaker of the House, called the new markets initiative, which would give American investors the same tax incentives to invest in the poor areas in America we now give them to invest in poor areas in Latin America, Africa, Asia, or some place else.

I think that a lot more can be done, but I hope and believe that this transportation assistance will really help.

So let me end where I began. We are moving close to a country where there really is opportunity for every responsible citizen. But we're not there yet. We are a stronger American community than we were 8 years ago, but there is still friction and sources of division within our American community. Now, we've got the most expansive, strong economy we've ever had, and I think we ought to set our sights on big goals.

Our goals should be prosperity for every family in every community still left behind. Our goals should be no child and no working family in poverty. And what I want to say to you is that we can achieve these goals and still keep the overall economy strong for the rest of America. We can pay the debt off in 12 years. That will keep interest rates down; it will keep businesses expanding. It will leave funds for people to make pay raises.

We can do this, but we have to decide to do it. And I just hope that not only in Colorado but all over America, people will see and hear about Mi Casa because of my trip here. And I hope every place where people feel good because they've reduced the welfare rolls 40 or 50 percent will understand that they can do much better when they see that Denver, thanks to people like you, got it down 90 percent. The transportation will help, but people have to make the initiative at the local level, too.

So thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:55 a.m. in the conference room at Mi Casa Resource Center for

Women. In his remarks, he referred to Carmen Carrillo, executive director, Mi Casa Resource Center for Women; and Mayor Wellington E. Webb of Denver and his wife, Wilma.

Remarks to the Colorado Coordinated and State Senate Democratic Fund in Denver

October 14, 2000

The President. Thank you very much, Mayor. Thank you for your friendship and your leadership. We just came back from a marvelous Denver institution called Mi Casa, where children are educated, after-school programs are held, young adolescents are taught to stay off drugs and not get pregnant and not become HIV infected, and young adults are taught how to get off welfare and how to be trained, in the case of women, for nontraditional jobs.

[A series of beeps interrupted the President's remarks.]

The President. Are the Republicans controlling the sound system? [Laughter]

So I want to thank the mayor. What is it?

[The beeps continued.]

The President. That might work. We may be getting feedback. That's better.

I want to thank General Salazar, Senator Perlmutter, Chairman Knaus. And I want to thank Congressman Udall for his friendship, and Diana—let me just make—I told Diana DeGette before I came out here that I went to a fundraiser for the Udall caucus the other day, because there is a Udall from New Mexico and a Udall from Colorado. So they just had a joint fundraiser—saved me the trouble of having to go to two events, and I really appreciated that. [Laughter] And then Diana proceeded to tell me that they were—the Udalls and she were three of the four members, with Ed Pastor, of the Coyote Caucus, that is, the Democrats of the Inter-Mountain West, the scarce group that will be swollen after this election on November 7th.

[At this point, a humming sound came over the public address system.]

The President. Something's shorting out. Is that it? Just unplug it. If that doesn't work,

God is sending us a message. [Laughter] See? There must be something over there that's aggravating it. Now is it off? Can you hear me now?

Audience members. Yes!

The President. No problem. I also want to thank Kent Toltz for running for Congress and ask you to help him get elected. I want to thank Walter and Christie Isenberg, Merle Chambers and Hugh Grant, Tommy and Pat Short, and anybody else that helped put this together today.

And I'd like to say just one personal word about Colorado. You know, I have been coming here for more than 20 years now. We had the Governors' conference here in 1980, the year of the Reagan landslide, shortly before I became the youngest ex-Governor in American history. And I was still invited to come to Colorado to give a speech in 1981. It's just something I've never forgotten.

Some of my closest personal friends that I've made in my entire life live here. And this State has been very good to me. Al Gore and I did win Colorado in 1992, and as I told Diana—she's talking about my numbers—even though we lost the State by 20,000 votes in '96, we actually ran 60,000 votes better against the registration, because the registration moved 100,000 to the Republicans between '92 and '96. Now you can bring it back, and I want to talk to you about that today.

I also want to thank Diana for having the moment of silence for our sailors who were lost on the U.S.S. *Cole*. Let me just say very briefly, I talked to the captain of the ship and to everybody up the chain of command, and some of them are coming home today, and we'll have a memorial service on Wednesday for them. They were just good American citizens, most of them, if you saw in your local press today, very young, most of them trying to find their